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# REPORT ON ROUNDTABLE ON GENDER AND PEACEBUILDING

# Report on Roundtable on Gender and Peacebuilding

## Introduction:

The relationship between peace-building and gender is a critical one. In many countries it is women who have been instrumental in reconstructing war-torn areas, fostering reconciliation and rebuilding sustainable societies after a period of violence or crisis. Sometimes because they are the only ones left living (for example, Rwanda); often because they are critical to the basic development of micro-economics and families in given societies. While it has been long recognized that the key to 'development', more generally, often lies in supporting women's activities, such wisdom has not yet broached the peace-building discussions either here in Canada or internationally. It was proposed therefore that an initial forum be held in order to explore the relationship between gender and peace-building and provide some specific recommendations to the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and the Canadian International Development Agency as it develops it overall policies on peace-building.

On Monday April 24th, a one day round table on gender and peace-building was held at the University of British Columbia, supported by the Centre for Foreign Policy Development. At the table was an international mixture of government officials, academics and non-governmental representatives from both the north and south (See appendix 1). The basic question put to the assembled group was: **How can women support peace-building initiatives and how can peace-building initiatives support women?** A paper and set of specific questions was circulated prior to the meeting and provided the focus for the discussion which ensued (see appendix 2). Finally, Guatemala was chosen as a specific case-study to discuss, within the larger rubric of peace-building initiatives, partly because of the extra-ordinary role of women in the peace negotiations in that country, partly because of Canada's interest in Guatemala and partly because Guatemala is at a critical juncture in its peace-building process. Three of the individuals who attended the roundtable therefore had a specific interest in and experience of the Guatemalan peace process and the role of women within it.

## Definition of peace-building:

One of the key problems first identified in our discussions was how to define peace-building. It was pointed out that even in international discussions many people use the term to describe different things. Out of this discussion may be distilled a number of recommendations:

1. **Canada should take the lead in developing a universally recognized and accepted definition of peace-building.**
2. **a) Peace-building should be defined in terms of its results rather than its inputs.** This is analogous to the 'Reinventing Government' approach to domestic government policy. Rather than measuring how many peace-keepers are on the ground or how much money is being spent in what activities; peace-building must be seen in the concrete construction of peace in a given country - the results for all people living in that country must be measured, rather than the activities of the people from the outside going in.

   **b) A results-based approach to peace-building initiatives must incorporate a gendered analysis including both: a) the impact on women of peace-building initiatives; b) the potential to mobilize women to support peace.** As well, it was argued by some that for women in

particular peace-building must incorporate development assistance, adapted to meet the needs of reconstructing civil society.

3. **In any peace-building initiative, Canada must ensure that women's voices are at the table.** Canada should consider whether or not to involve itself in a peace-building initiative if women are not included, or what leverage can be brought to bear to insure women's voices are heard. A specific and recent example is Guatemala where women's voices were included in the negotiations and El Salvador where they were not. A set of related recommendations include:

   a) Canada should support civil society's involvement in peace negotiations.

   b) Canada should examine models already available (for example, South Africa, Guatemala which have incorporated women's groups into their post-conflict reconstruction negotiations)

4. **Canada must recognize the difference in the definition of violence and insecurity for women and men, and the differing needs therefore of peace-building initiatives.** There are specific forms of violence and insecurity which affect women in different or more profound ways than men. For example, mass rape, land mines, domestic violence, displaced persons, etc. are specific ways in which women (and children) are impacted by conflict differently or in greater numbers than men. Canada should be encouraged to continue its leadership in areas such as demining, and consider more broadly other aspects of violence as they impact on women specifically, in order to insure that such insecurity is addressed in peace-building initiatives.

## Areas of Analysis

After the general discussion of how one defines peace-building, the group chose to look at gender and peace building under four general headings: 1) Supporting Political reconstruction 2) Strengthening and Democratizing Legal institutions 3) Transforming Military and Human Security 4) Economic and Social Reconstruction

### 1. Supporting Political Reconstruction

Political reconstruction is often defined as the holding of free elections - it was pointed out that limiting peace-building, in the political sphere to this goal, may not be helpful in insuring women's participation in political society. Rather, if women are to be included in the political realm, the goals of political peace-building must be viewed more broadly as good governance and the expansion of civil society. **One specific recommendation that was made was to increase the number of contacts between women's groups, in countries affected and Canadian NGO's, particularly indigenous women.** Secondly, it was argued that human rights should be at the centre of any peace-building initiative. **Canada might support women's rights by providing support for dissemination of information about women's and children's international rights**, either through the education system or popular workshops. Finally, some of the participants believe that the best place to begin political reconstruction is at the local level. Domestic NGO's in Canada could work, for example, with the Federation of Canadian municipalities to support city-specific programmes aimed at strengthening the capacity of women's groups and mid-level bureaucrats to engage in political dialogue.

### 2. Strengthening and Democratizing Institutions

Canada could take an important role in regards to the relationship between gender and institution building in several ways. **First and foremost, Canada should insure that any support given by Canada in terms of personnel or training in**

**judicial, legal or police development must include both a gendered perspective and women as members of the peace-keeping/peace-building team.** For example, in Guatemala in the last year at the pushing of women's groups, the government has now an enforceable law against domestic violence but the police have little training in domestic incidents and the prosecution of violators of this new law. Canadian expertise could help to develop the tools to combat this very real threat to women's security.

### 3. Transforming Military and Human Security

There was a lot of discussion about how a militarized society is transformed into a civil society, after a period of violence or crisis, and to ensure that violence does not re-emerge. One of the key issues in countries like Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, South Africa and Guatemala is the establishment of Truth Commissions or similar tribunals to allow people to document, publicly the experiences they went through during the period of conflict. The dual issues of amnesty and impunity must be addressed with specific reference to crimes against women. UN reports have documented the use of rape as an instrument in war in Bosnia Herzegovina, Haiti, Kashmir, Bangladesh, Kuwait, Peru and Rwanda. The documentation of rape as a war crime is still very limited. **Canada should support in any peace-building initiative the addressing of crimes against women in the processes of specific countries.** Secondly, **Canada should take the lead in lobbying the UNHCR to broaden its definition of refugee to include those fleeing gender-based violence.**

One area which was mentioned several times and has largely been neglected by the international community is the demobilization of women soldiers. **Canada should support research and analysis on the special needs of demobilized female soldiers and guerrillas.** It has often been the case that women, who have been involved in military activity find themselves at the end of a war suddenly redefined in a completely new role, within the home and denied some of the public benefits (land, education or training) accorded to male demobilized soldiers.

### 4. Economic and Social Reconstruction

For women and children, it is the recognition and respect of economic and social rights which is perhaps most critical to their long term security. One point which was made during the discussions and should be reiterated here is the strong link between the economic and social well-being of women and children in any given society. In countries like Guatemala and Rwanda where women were, until recently, unable to own property in their own right, this must be recognized as an enormous obstacle to the rebuilding of society. **Thus Canada should endeavor to support women's groups seeking to have the right to property and providing leverage through micro-credit where possible for the creation of a civil economy.**

Secondly, the role of International Financial Institutions on peace-building and women and children in particular was raised repeatedly. **It was recommended that the Canadian government should examine structural adjustment programs and their particular impact on women and peace-building, as an on-going part of their analysis around where to become involved in peace-building initiatives.**

Finally, it was argued that not enough work had been done on a cross comparative analysis of different models of peace-building and gender to look at how women were incorporated

or not incorporated in the reconstruction of a society and the results of different models of economic and social reconstruction. **Therefore, it was recommended that Canada initiate some research into different models of peace-building, and how women have both been supportive of and supported by a particular set of arrangements, to see which may work in future negotiations.**

## Conclusion:

The roundtable provided each one of us with the opportunity to address the central question: How can women support peace-building and how can peace-building support women in post-conflict situations? A number of recommendations emerged as a result of our discussions, as discussed above. First and foremost is the need to find a universal definition of peace-building which is able somehow to capture what is happening on the ground, the extent to which peace is actually being built rather than counting beans in Ottawa. Secondly, peace-building must address the needs of both men and women. This means, in concrete terms, women from the country concerned must be at the table in any negotiations, women must be part of the peace-building team from Canada, and a gender analysis must be done to understand both the violence and insecurity experienced by women and their specific needs. These general recommendations are reflected in each of the specific areas of analysis that we looked at as a group, from political reconstruction to strengthening of democratic institutions, to the transformation of a society from conflict to civil peace. Peace-building, as has been demonstrated in a country like Guatemala, can provide a unique opportunity to harness the strength of women in any given country to rebuild a peaceful world, while simultaneously using the process to empower women and bring all people into the building process of these newly emerging democracies.